

## Original research

## The Development of the Psychological Well-being of People Recovered from Covid-19 in the Post-corona era: A Grounded Theory study

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** The present study was conducted with the aim of presenting a comprehensive theory to explain the changes in psychological well-being in those who recovered from COVID-19.

**Research method:** This was a qualitative data-based study. To this end, 35 people who met the criteria for entering the research sample were selected through purposive sampling until information saturation was reached and answered the interview protocol questions during a semi-structured interview.

**Findings:** Based on textual analysis of the data, factors such as the ability to tolerate ambiguity, facing death, understanding absolute loneliness, and facing oneself in interaction with intervening factors and contexts such as family support, medical staff, and attention to spiritual matters have led to positive outcomes such as an increased understanding of the meaning of life, acceptance, softening in relationships, and understanding the concept of love.

**Conclusion:** Thus, it can be concluded from the findings that COVID-19 has led to the expansion of psychological well-being after recovery and has created fundamental changes in the way we look at material and spiritual phenomena. The formation of such a novel perspective is the beginning of living in the here and now.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, grounded theory, meaning of life, Psychological well-being

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### **Introduction:**

Infectious diseases, particularly COVID-19, have become a serious threat to global public health in the 21st century(1). As a result of this pandemic human life has faced enormous widespread changes which might end up ample psychological consequences such as anxiety, depression, excessive stress, substance abuse, excessive alcohol consumption, post-traumatic stress, and unresolved grief (2-5). However, contrary to such unpleasant impacts, as it is suggested by the positive psychology approach, there might be the hope and possibility of post-traumatic growth and positive psychological evolution in individuals surviving from COVID-19(6-9). In fact, according to some related studies there are survivors of such difficulties who have experienced positive changes in their approach toward life, social relationships, and spirituality(10, 11). Thus, the present qualitative research, aimed at investigating the factors influencing the transformation of psychological well-being in COVID-19 survivors through deeper exploration of this phenomenon and identifying opportunities for growth via adaptation employed by the survivors to face, struggle and deal with challenges posed by the pandemic.

### **Research Method:**

The present study is designed based on the grounded theory (GT) type with the purpose of developing a theory to explain the factors influencing post-traumatic growth in COVID-19 survivors. Participants in this research were selected using purposive sampling with maximum variation. The selection criterion was individuals with a history of COVID-19 with pulmonary involvement and hospitalization in a hospital or at home.

Therefore to proceed through data collection initially a semi-structured interview was developed which included 7 main open-ended questions. Then the responses to the questions were recorded, transcribed and coded. As a result of the open coding stage approximately 75 categories were obtained. Finally, considering all the aforementioned informational perspectives, and knowing that achieving theoretical saturation is the endpoint of sampling in this research approach, 35 virtual interviews, each consisting of open-ended questions and lasting approximately 40 minutes, were administered after which no new experiences were reported in the participants' talks; consequently due to the information saturation, the interviews were stopped.

Then, to ensure the trustworthiness and quality of the data, the following measures were taken using the audit trail method and multiple data collection: the supervision of an individual with qualitative research experience was utilized throughout all stages of the research. Additionally, another individual outside the research team, with qualitative research experience and familiar with the research objective (post-traumatic growth), was consulted to review the codes and categories extracted from the quotes (external auditor method). Then, the inter-coder agreement was assessed. Additionally, credibility was ensured by presenting the themes and sub-themes to several participants and incorporating their feedback into the final description. In the end, through the final report, verbal

samples from the participants were presented, and efforts were made to thoroughly and accurately describe the studied procedures, context, and research conditions (thick description method) (12).

### **Results:**

In this section, the present grounded theory- based study the researchers focused on developing a theory to explain the factors influencing post-traumatic growth in COVID-19 survivors as the main objective. As a result of the interview data analysis more than 580 open codes were identified. Subsequently, axial and selective coding were performed, and efforts were made to describe the causal, intervening, contextual conditions and consequences of the sever Covid -19 infection as explained below:

**Causal Conditions:** In the present study, according to the participants' perspectives, the main factor in post-traumatic growth among individuals with COVID-19 was the ability to tolerate ambiguity. The component of ambiguity tolerance was a causal condition for post-traumatic growth. This category included the axial codes of ambiguity tolerance (i.e. the ambiguity emerged from the Covid 19 phenomenon), confrontation with death, and absolute loneliness (i.e. the emotional experiences of living in lockdown condition).

**Intervening Conditions:** In this study, the most significant intervening factor affecting post-traumatic growth was identified as the experience of support/care from significant others (i.e. The emotional and psychological support) and public health caregivers.

**Contextual Conditions:** In the present study, resorting to God and spirituality were considered among important contextual factors for enduring the existing conditions and providing an appropriate response.

**Consequences:** According to the participants' reports, the consequences resulting from severe COVID-19 infection can be categorized as follows: positive consequences, including increased love and affection for those around them, a growing understanding of the concept of living in the here and now, reduced false pride and acknowledgment of human weakness and frailty, softening in human relationships and increased desire to help others, greater peace in life, and less focus on financial problems."

### **Conclusion:**

This qualitative study focuses on the positive changes experienced by COVID-19 survivors in Tehran, Iran. As the results demonstrated, similar to previous studies on other traumatic stressor events, such as infectious diseases and natural disasters (13-15), the COVID-19 virus can have multidimensional impacts on survivors, including prompting them to reassess their lives and priorities, increasing their awareness of the importance of taking steps to stay healthy, improving relationships, and fostering personal growth. Following COVID-19 infection, the participants in this study experienced positive

changes in their attitudes and values towards life. "They re-evaluated their perceptions of life and reassessed their priorities. They realized the value of simply being alive and understood the importance of their family to them. Growth in relationships demonstrates the importance of social support and relationships in the process of coping with trauma. Furthermore, the experience of COVID-19 infection led to improved health awareness and behaviors, including enhanced hygiene habits, healthy lifestyle practices, and preventive healthcare. Through a traumatic event, individuals become aware of their vulnerabilities and strengths, which leads to the development of coping behaviors(16, 17). In the end, consistent with the studies of Theodorescu et al.(18) and Hanson et al. (19), it is seriously suggested to researchers in the field to shed light on further studies delving into the concept of "post traumatic survival growth" opening new horizons toward further and deeper health related, psychology oriented and administrative developments to improve both patients and survivors in similar phenomena (such as COVID). This can help the development of global well-fare and wellbeing.

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